

Public Hearing speech at Capital on February 27, 2009

My name is Joan Papale

I live in Wallingford.

Volunteer for the American Heart Association

**Bill # SB 981— AN ACT CONCERNING THE AVAILABILITY OF
AUTOMATIC EXTERNAL DEFIBRILLATORS IN SCHOOLS**

Committee—AHA and CATA

My position: I believe all schools should have at least one AED on there premises and trained staff in CPR and AED use.

My life “appeared” very normal on August 23rd. We had just returned from a family vacation in Mystic. The next morning, on August 24th, my life changed forever. I received the most horrifying phone call, the one every parent dreads. The phone rings, but when I pick it up, the voice on the other end is hysterical. My husband said to come quickly, Mike fainted and it’s bad. I immediately jumped up and raced in my car towards the recreation center convinced that Mike was probably sitting up by now. As I was heading to the recreation center I remember thinking—well as long as I don’t hear an ambulance—its o.k. Seconds later, to my devastation, I hear the sirens to an ambulance, the ambulance is moving quickly, I look up, see my husband in the front seat and know it must be bad. I quickly turn my wheel, put on my blinkers and follow the ambulance. I pulled into Mid State Medical Center as Mike was being wheeled out of the ambulance. He had a ventilator breathing for him and machines and wires attached everywhere. He looked unrecognizable. I felt like I had been transported to another world. This couldn’t be happening to my strong, healthy son. He was perfectly fine the night before. The emergency room staff whisked my husband and me into a private room near Mike. I was in a fog. My husband was hysterical, strange and unknown to me. He never got upset. They sent in a social worker to sit with us. Her name was Claudia. She was wonderful. She comforted my husband and kept encouraging me to let go. I was too stoic, she said. Claudia didn’t realize that I was trying to send Mike positive energy from me. I was talking to him mind to mind, heart to heart. I wanted him to know I was there, that he would be alright and to use my energy to fight.

We were brought to Connecticut Children's Medical Center Intensive Care Unit. Dr. Heller, a cardiologist, took my husband and me to a conference room in the intensive care unit that first evening and told us that Mike had not fainted. He went into cardiac arrest and experienced an Aborted Sudden Cardiac Death. There was a one in a million chance, that he survive, due to the severity of his cardiac arrest. Mike spent 14 indescribable days in the intensive care unit battling for his life. He was diagnosed with Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy, has an implanted defibrillator and lives on two heart pills a day.

On August 24th the most traumatic, horrifying, and paralyzing experience occurred to me. My healthy 17 year old son went into cardiac arrest. My life changed in a second and would never be the same. Two years later, it's not the same. We all believe, in a sense, nothing bad is going to happen to one of our loved ones. I believed this too, until it happened to me. For the first time, as a parent, I lost complete control. There was nothing I could do for my son, but pray. Yesterday we learned Mike will need to have surgery next Wednesday at Hartford Hospital to replace the two leads going into his heart. We were both stunned and frightened by this information. Life continues to be worrisome.

I am here today to make a heartfelt request. Mike went into cardiac arrest on August 24th at the Wallingford Recreation Center. Mike was lucky, we were blessed. There was no AED at the Recreation Center where Mike collapsed. If not for, our hero, Bob Heubner, and the outstanding EMT staff, Mike would not have survived. It is vital to get this Bill passed. We need to work together to keep all of our Connecticut residents safe.

Thank you for your time.